

LIMPOPO PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA'S SPEECH DURING A MEET AND GREET WITH DISTRICT OFFICIALS, CIRCUIT MANAGERS, AND SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AT NGOAKO RAMATHLODI SPORTS COMPLEX, SESHEGO

12 August 2024

Program Director, MEC Mavhungu Lerule Ramakhanya,
Acting HOD, Ms. Yvonne Mathabatha,
Chief Director District Coordination, Mr. Deon Letshedi,
District Director Capricorn South Education District,
Acting DDG Corporate Management, Mr. Naphtali Malope,
Members of School Governing Bodies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I join you today in this significant gathering of educational leaders, united in one common goal of advancing the quality of education in our beloved province. The task we shoulder is not a light one, but it is a noble one, for we are shaping the future of Limpopo, one learner at a time.

Program Director, allow me to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude and appreciation to each of you. The role you play in the lives of our learners can not be overstated. The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," rings true in our context, where district officials, principals, circuit managers, teachers, and community members come together to nurture and guide our children. Your dedication and unwavering commitment to the academic and personal development of our learners are the foundation upon which the future of this province is built.

Program Director, it is also fitting that I take this opportunity to celebrate your hard work and the impressive results it has yielded. We are all aware of the challenges we face, yet despite these, you have led the education department to achieve a remarkable improvement in our provincial pass rate. From 72.1% in 2022, we have risen to an outstanding 79.54% in 2023. This achievement is a testament to your tireless efforts, innovative strategies, and the resilience of our learners. I am optimistic that with the continued dedication of all stakeholders, Limpopo will soon rank among the top three provinces in the country.

While we have much to celebrate, we must also acknowledge the hurdles that lie ahead. Our education system is not without its challenges—budget cuts, evolving curricula, the demands of integrating information and communication technology (ICT), and the perennial issue of limited resources are but a few. However, I want to assure you that these challenges are not insurmountable. Our government remains steadfast in its commitment to investing in education. We recognize that education is the cornerstone of economic development and social transformation. Therefore, we will continue to prioritize the allocation of resources to ensure that our schools are equipped to deliver the quality education our learners deserve.

One of the most pressing issues we face is the achievement gap between learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It is a matter of great concern that learners born into lower-income families often face greater obstacles to academic success. This is not just an educational issue but a social justice issue. As leaders, it is our duty to level the playing field to ensure that every learner, regardless of their background, has access to the same opportunities and resources.

We must confront the reality that our province is predominantly rural. This presents unique challenges, but it also offers us an opportunity to innovate and adapt. Our rural context should not be viewed as a limitation, but rather as a call to action—a challenge to be more creative, more resourceful, and more determined in our efforts to provide a quality education for all. We must work hard to change the negative narrative about our province and prove to all and sundry that Limpopo is capable of competing with everyone.

Program Director, to this end, our government has implemented several initiatives aimed at supporting our most vulnerable schools. We have increased funding for schools in disadvantaged areas, recognizing that these schools often require more support to overcome the challenges they face. We have expanded the provision of free school meals to ensure that no child goes hungry while at school, understanding that a well-nourished learner is more likely to succeed. Additionally, we have made significant investments in programs designed to support learners with special needs, ensuring that every child, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive. Top of our agenda is to eradicate pitlatrins and replace them with the enviroloo, of which the project is near completion.

However, we know that government intervention alone is not enough. I urge each of you to think critically and creatively about how we can better support our most vulnerable learners. What more can we do at the district and school levels to ensure that every learner has a fair chance at success? How can

we leverage the resources we have to make the greatest impact? These are questions we must continually ask ourselves as we strive to improve our education system.

Program Director, another critical challenge that demands our attention is the shortage of skilled teachers, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The importance of these subjects in preparing our learners for the future can not be overstated. In today's rapidly changing world, proficiency in STEM subjects is not just an advantage; it is a necessity. Yet, we face a significant shortfall in qualified teachers who are equipped to deliver high-quality education in these areas.

Program Director, our government has introduced several measures to address this shortage. The Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme, for instance, provides financial support to students who choose teaching as a career, with a particular focus on critical subjects like mathematics and science. We are also exploring additional incentives to attract and retain skilled teachers in our province. But these efforts will only bear fruit if they are supported by a strong commitment from all stakeholders to make teaching a desirable and respected profession.

As educational leaders, you have a crucial role to play in this regard. I encourage you to foster a culture of continuous professional development within your schools and districts. Invest in your teachers, support their growth, and create environments where they can thrive. A motivated and well-equipped teacher is the most powerful tool we have in our quest to improve education outcomes.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the pivotal role that each of you plays in the success of our education system. As district officials, principals, and circuit managers, you are not just administrators; you are leaders. You set the tone, you shape the culture, and you drive the vision of excellence in our schools. Your leadership is what will determine whether our province rises to meet the challenges we face or whether we fall short of our potential.

Program Director, our ANC-led government is deeply committed to supporting you in this mission. We recognize that you are on the front lines of our efforts to build a brighter future for Limpopo. We will continue to provide the resources, the policies, and the support you need to succeed.

But let us also remember that leadership is not just about managing resources or implementing policies; it is about inspiring others to achieve their best. It is about creating a shared vision that motivates and unites us all in the pursuit of a common goal: the success and well-being of our learners.

As we move forward, let us do so with a renewed sense of purpose and determination. Let us work together to overcome the challenges we face, build on the successes we have achieved, and ensure that every learner in Limpopo has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your dedication, your passion, and your commitment to the future of our province. I look forward to continuing this journey with you, and I have no doubt that, together, we will achieve great things.

I thank you.